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REPORT ON THE OUTCOME OF AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE CIS CONFERENCE

1. In line with General Assembly resolution 50/151 of 21 December 1995, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees convened on 30 and 31 May 1996 in Geneva a Regional Conference to address the problems of refugees, displaced persons, other forms of involuntary displacement and returnees in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and relevant neighbouring States (hereafter referred to as the CIS Conference). The Conference was the culmination of an ongoing process that had begun in 1994. It was held under the joint auspices of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)(through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)). The Conference was attended by delegates from 87 States (including all 12 CIS countries), 27 international organizations (in addition to UNHCR, IOM and OSCE), 2 other governmental organizations and 77 non-governmental organizations. The Conference adopted a Programme of Action, which had been endorsed by a Preparatory Conference held in Minsk (Belarus) on 8 May 1996.

2. The three main objectives of the Conference, cited below, are considered to have been met.

(i) Providing a reliable forum for the countries of the region to discuss problems of population displacement in a humanitarian and non-political manner: This was achieved through a series of sub-regional meetings and expert meetings to discuss such problems and identify solutions, and the establishment of a Drafting Committee tasked with the formulation of a wide plan for action to address those problems, based on a declaration of principles.

(ii) Reviewing population movements in the region, and clarifying categories of concern: The discussions held among CIS countries and between them and other countries, as well as with international and non-governmental organizations, were based on an analysis of the different movements of population, and led eventually to the identification of the various categories of populations displaced in the CIS countries. Definitions were developed, and were included in the Programme of Action adopted by the Conference.

(iii) Devising an integrated strategy which would enable the CIS countries to cope better with and prevent population displacement, as well as manage and regulate other types of migratory movements in the region: The Programme of Action, which was adopted by consensus by the Conference, is a framework for action by the CIS countries, in addressing displacement problems, on the basis of internationally recognized principles, in a spirit of international cooperation, solidarity and burden-sharing.

The Programme of Action consists essentially of two parts: a chapter on principles and a sequence of chapters on action (institutional framework, operational framework, prevention, cooperation and implementation/follow-up). It will provide guidance for the CIS countries in their handling of the complex migratory movements in the region. The Programme of Action also provides a basis for UNHCR's work in the CIS countries for the next few years. During the preparatory process, UNHCR and IOM developed a joint operational strategy that envisages both organizations collaborating closely in all their activities in the region, either by working together, or through sharing information and complementing each other. The joint approach should allow for a more effective distribution of tasks in the countries of the region and a more efficient use of limited resources.

3. Shortly after the Conference, UNHCR and IOM submitted to the international community, for financial support, a package of projects in three of the CIS countries, where some programming activity had taken place just before the Conference was held. This was a first, limited step in the implementation of the Programme of Action. A wider review of priorities in all twelve CIS countries is to take place from July to September, which will be the basis for the formulation of UNHCR and IOM's programmes for 1997-98. To that effect, consultations are planned with relevant departments of the CIS countries' Governments, and with other international and non-governmental organizations. A broad presentation of all UNHCR's activities in the CIS countries in 1997-98 will be made in October 1996, jointly with IOM. This will include activities foreseen, and already approved, in the 1997 General Programmes and Special Programmes, as well as new activities designed through the CIS Conference follow-up consultative process. In this manner, UNHCR and IOM will present to the international community a coherent overview of their plans for 1997 and 1998. Efforts will be made to associate as many relevant partners as possible in presenting this broad picture of priorities in addressing displacement in the region.

4. The Programme of Action foresees the establishment of a Steering Group, composed of representatives of participating States, to monitor the follow-up process. This Group should be convened at least once a year for the next four years, and will include NGO representatives. As part of the follow-up mechanism being set up by UNHCR, IOM and OSCE, UNHCR has created a small unit

at Headquarters, whose main task is to ensure that the Programme of Action is being implemented. The unit will also provide support and guidance to Field Offices and relevant Headquarters units and will collate information on progress in implementation, to submit to the Steering Group. Two professionals, including one officer specifically dedicated to follow-up with NGOs, and one general service staff member comprise the unit. A first meeting of the Steering Group will take place in the last part of 1996. UNHCR is cooperating with IOM and OSCE in the setting-up of their own follow-up arrangements, which will form part of one mechanism.